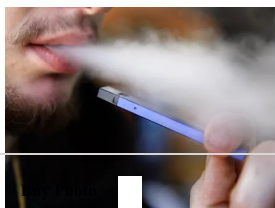


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JUULing is the new teen vaping fad taking over school bathrooms

Clara Hatcher, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel Published 6:00 a.m. CT March 12, 2018 | Updated 3:10 p.m. CT March 12, 2018
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(Photo: Rick Wood / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Jason Lindauer never knew why he started smoking cigarettes. His high school friends were doing it, he said, so he did too. More than four years later, the 20-year-old UW-Milwaukee student has transitioned from cigarettes to e-cigarettes and, now, the JUUL — a trendy new vape with different flavors and enough nicotine to match a pack of cigarettes.

Lindauer sells the devices at Milwaukee Vapor, 3470 N. Oakland Ave. — but not if he can help it.

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While Lindauer considers the JUUL to be a better alternative than cigarettes, he says most customers are college and high school-aged nonsmokers and he doesn't want to put them on the road to nicotine addiction.

"I don't like selling to people if I can refer them to something else," Lindauer said about JUUL. "I use it a lot and wish I didn't."

Over the last year, JUUL has become ubiquitous on college and high school campuses. As of the last quarter of 2017, it accounted for nearly 47% of the market share for e-cigarettes — in comparison to 25% a year earlier, according to data from Wells Fargo.

The device is designed to be an alternative to combustible tobacco products, like cigarettes, and includes flavored JUUL "pods" that range from "Virginia Tobacco" to "Crème Brulee." JUULs, which are small and sleek enough to be easily mistaken for a USB, use a regulated heating element to activate ingredients and create an aerosol vapor that users inhale.



An anti-JUULing poster is on display in a Shorewood High School restroom. (Photo: Nia Kamara)

The company is strident — at least in public statements — about opposing teenage smoking and restricts online purchases to customers over 21. But the product has been described as the "iPhone of e-cigs," and it's perfect for any teenager trying to be discreet. And while the aerosol vapor from a JUUL does not contain tobacco, one JUUL pod contains 5% nicotine by weight — or "200 puffs," according to the JUUL website. Most other e-cigarettes and vapes contain anywhere from 0.03% to 0.12% nicotine.

Nia Kamara, a 15-year-old sophomore at Shorewood High School, said the easy-to-hide design and different flavors makes the device particularly attractive to kids her age. She said she started noticing last summer that many of her friends were using JUULs.

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Kamara does not have a JUUL herself. In fact, she is involved in a Wisconsin-based, youth tobacco prevention program called FACT and hopes to educate her peers on the dangers of using e-cigarettes, vapes and tobacco products. Kamara estimated that 35% of her classmates use the product daily.

Students say access to the product is easy. Store clerks don't always check IDs, or young students get older friends to make purchases for them.

"It's so common that I don't think anyone thinks about it. I think people think it's weird if people don't do it," one of Kamara's friends said. "People don't think of it the same as smoking a cigarette."

Both students say some classmates will excuse themselves at least once a class period to puff on their JUULs in school bathrooms.

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Over the last year, the popularity of the electronic cigarette JUUL has grown dramatically. The small, discreet nature of the device makes it possible for students to hide their JUULs with a closed fist. (Photo: Rick Wood / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Danielle Foster, a 15-year-old student at Nicolet High School, said JUULing in the bathroom occurs at her school as well. Like Kamara, Foster is in FACT and neither uses nor wants a JUUL. But, many of her friends use the device and Foster said that she sees the trend as a problem.

"I see a lot of people using them and teachers don't know how to look for them," Foster said. "They (JUUL users) think it's better than smoking weed or cigarettes."

Schools across the Milwaukee area have adjusted, or are considering adjusting, school policy as a response to JUULing in schools. In Menomonee Falls, for example, JUULing is considered a major violation of the athletic code of conduct and treated the same as smoking a cigarette, marijuana or drinking alcohol.

Other schools have sent home newsletters on the subject — not just at the high school level but in the elementary schools that feed into them.

"It's a concern where kids don't think it's hurting them," Menomonee Falls Athletic Director Ryan Anderson said. "I'm not proud of it and I think every school in southeastern Wisconsin is going through this to a certain degree. It's not something we want our children to do."

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